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A PRECEDENT FOR DISARMAMENT.

A SUGGESTION TO THE PEACE CONFERENCE.

BY ERNEST CROSBY.

HIDDEN away in the archives of the Department of State at Washington is a little document which has attracted but small attention; and yet its effect upon the welfare of two nations has been immense, while its purport is altogether unique. It is an "Arrangement" between the United States and Great Britain, bearing date April 28th, 1817, and signed by Richard Rush, acting as Secretary of State on behalf of this country, and Charles Bagot, Envoy Extraordinary of His Britannic Majesty. The entire contents of this document could easily be copied upon a half-sheet of paper, and it reads in substance as follows:

"The naval force to be maintained upon the American Lakes by the Government of the United States and His Majesty shall henceforth be confined to the following vessels on each side, that is:

"On Lake Ontario, to one vessel not exceeding one hundred tons burthen, and armed with one eighteen-pound cannon;

"On the Upper Lakes, to two vessels (of the same burthen and armament);

"On the waters of Lake Champlain to one vessel (of the same burthen and armament);

"All other armed vessels in these Lakes shall be forthwith dismantled, and no other vessels of war shall be there built or armed."

The war of 1812 had made Lake Erie and Lake Champlain the scenes of bloody conflicts. The people living on the shores of those lakes were for the most part connected by blood and traditions, and the war was in character almost a civil war. It was clearly desirable to prevent such conflicts, if possible, in the future; and to some wise and humane statesman the happy idea occurred of removing, or reducing to a minimum, the instruments

of strife, recognizing the fact, proclaimed by Victor Hugo, that the chief cause of war is to be found in the armaments of nations.

It can hardly be denied that naval men desire naval war. They would not be worth their salt if they did not. When the lawyer actually wishes for the abolition of litigation, when the physician prays honestly for the disappearance of patients from the surface of the earth, when any man longs for the lack of opportunity to practise his chosen profession or trade, then, perhaps, will the professional fighter yearn for peace. But the soldier, *quâ* soldier, ought to wish for war. It is his only *raison d'être*. Apparently appreciating this fact, the men who drafted the agreement of 1817 provided for the removal of that incentive to war which the existence and display of a naval force necessarily involves. Their argument seems to have been that Satan will find some mischief still for idle ships to do, and, in consequence, for nearly a century only four toy gunboats have been kept in commission by either country in these waters.

How fully the result has justified their action! We have had plenty of disagreements with Canada. Time and again the disputes between us have reached the point of acerbity and irritation. It is almost certain that, if we had had our weapons handy, one or other of us would have drawn a bead on the other. But, luckily, our hip pockets were empty, and no damage was done. And consider for a moment how different the aspect of the Great Lakes would be to-day if this Arrangement had not been signed! The mad rivalry of armaments would have been reproduced in miniature in each of them. Manufacturers and contractors would be besieging Congress and Parliament to authorize the construction, now of a floating battery, and now of a battle-ship, and each new vessel on either side would be used as justification for a similar one on the other. To withstand such navies, land defences would be necessary, and garrisons to man them. Every port—Oswego, Buffalo, Cleveland, Duluth, Hamilton, Toronto, Kingston,—would require modern forts and ordnance; immense expenditure would be necessary even in times of peace, and the continuance of peace would be rendered precarious. The possibility of such a state of affairs has been removed by the Arrangement of 1817, and it is quite likely that the example of peacefulness which it set along the Lake frontier has had the effect of making more or less trivial the preparations for war on the rest of the boundary-line. Has

there been anything enervating or unmanly in all this? Not at all. No one doubts for a moment the courage and ability to fight of the men on both sides, but that courage and ability have been released for service in the conquests of nature and industry. Such have been the far-reaching effects of the Arrangement of 1817, which at the time was not thought worthy of the title of "Treaty" and is called simply an "Arrangement." Mr. Monroe was President then, and his name is associated with another declaration of policy; but I am inclined to think that there are possibilities in the Rush-Bagot Arrangement which may well eclipse those of the Monroe Doctrine.

It is a pity that all our acts toward Canada have not been as graceful as our assent to this Arrangement. Visit the towns on the north bank of the St. Lawrence River, look across that easily be-ferried stream, and think of the artificial obstacle which our tariff has erected along its course. We spend millions to bridge chasms, to tunnel mountain ranges, to bring into nearer communication widely separated points, and then, by a stroke of the pen, we conjure up imaginary impediments to intercourse, which make the worst obstructions of nature seem like child's play. If we could put the Atlantic Ocean next to the St. Lawrence and then on either bank pile up the Alps, the Andes and the Himalayas, it would cost less to bring goods across them from Canada into the United States than it costs to-day to pass the invisible fiscal line. When an American first walks along the great river on Canadian soil and looks over into his native land, and thinks of the vast arbitrary gulf which has been set between them by his own nation, then at last he sees what a slap in the face to our neighbors our protective tariff is, and how we have, so far as in us lies, shut them out in outer economic darkness. Surely, from the lowest standpoint of policy, this is a mistake. Not long ago an acquaintance of mine, an anti-Imperialist and free-trader, was by some peculiar chance invited to address a conservative, Imperialist and somewhat Jingo society in a Canadian city. He presented himself as an ambassador from a minority, expressed his regret that so much of the policy of his country was unfriendly, hoped for a time when the Canadian, without abating a jot of his patriotism, might feel as much at home under the Stars and Stripes as under the Union Jack, and cited the Arrangement of 1817 as a conspicuous instance of neighborliness, and a good example for the rest of the

world. His remarks were received with enthusiasm, and he was informed afterwards by a Canadian who was present that a confirmed follower of Mr. Chamberlain, who sat next to him, said as they went out, "If they all talked like that, they'd have us in no time!" Friendliness is the best policy.

The second Peace Conference, called by the Tsar, is soon to meet; and its members will wish to have something practical to do. Statesmen and lawyers are afraid of untried paths, and they are always searching for precedents. Why cannot our delegation carry with them this precedent of 1817 which our grandfathers have left to us, and which has worked with such entire success? It is fitting that Mr. Roosevelt, the historian of the Naval War of 1812, should have a hand in applying its best lesson. Even a short step in advance along this line would be a notable departure. Some other sea can be selected for the reduction of armaments. The Mediterranean, the Baltic, the Japan Sea, could be made the scenes of a similar experiment, which is indeed an experiment no longer. In time, the principle could be extended to the Atlantic or the Pacific, and finally to navies as a whole. Nor is there anything to prevent its application to land forces. It may be easier to enforce such an arrangement in the Great Lakes than in more open seas, but the principle is always the same. Canada has natural access for war-vessels from the sea into Lake Ontario and by canal into the other Lakes, but that has not made the Arrangement less fruitful. It is no valid objection to a proposed treaty that it may possibly be broken. If it could not be broken, it would not be worth while to make it. In this whole matter of disarmament, too, we are in a far better situation to take the initiative than any other great Power, for we have no mighty standing army menacing us at our doors. With the precedent of 1817 in their hands, our delegates can with good grace urge an extension of the principle to other international relations, and thus take a leading part in the Conference, and place the world under lasting obligations to them.

ERNEST CROSBY.